

Resolve to Evolve

Get a jumpstart on your New Year's resolutions at Pelican Hill's two-day Balanced Wellness retreat in Newport Beach.

Story by Allison Young

THE HOLIDAY AFTERMATH isn't pretty. Party-hopping instead of Pilates has left you feeling like an over-stuffed turkey. And to top it off, you've been feeling as frenzied as Santa on Christmas Eve. Time to kick the New Year off on the right foot. Time for some healthy me-time. Enter the Balanced Wellness program at The Spa at Pelican Hill, a two-day retreat that reverses the above and more.

Balance is nothing new to Pelican Hill, a 504-acre luxury resort nestled in the hills above Newport Beach, Calif. Look around the palatial paradise, built in the style of Italy's Andrea Palladio, and you'll see feats of symmetrical perfection: arched porticos, barrel-vaulted ceilings and corniced columns, not to mention stunning vistas of the sea. The architecture breathes the very balance you're in search of.

Finding balance can be like the holy grail of health, yet Pelican Hill's expert wellness team has boiled it down to four commandments: eat less, exercise more, stress less, reflect more. Sounds simple; the key is how to adopt it over the long haul. That's the power of the program. Instead of a boot camp blast that leaves you burned out, the two-day retreat, which combines yoga, cardio and strength training with guided discussions, healthy eating demos and farm-fresh foods, teaches sustainable habits.

Eat Less

Health advice can be confusing. One day eggs are evil; the next they're nutrition gold. Thankfully, your wellness gurus, led by kinesiology grad Kasia Mays, are there to set the record straight. They'll answer questions and dispense easily digestible nutrition advice without sounding preachy. Over a light lunch of, say, green beans and roasted beets, you might learn that sugar cravings could be the result of not enough good fat or that eating smaller portions more frequently will prevent peaks and valleys in energy. But the biggest take-home message is something you discover all on your

own: You can consume fewer calories without feeling deprived. The menu of smoothies, salads, snacks and soups, made largely with organic ingredients hand-picked at the nearby Irvine Farm, proves it. The key is quality calories made with fresh, natural ingredients (not your usual protein bars and Diet Cokes). Instead of wanting to raid the mini-bar (which has been conveniently emptied), you'll feel—surprise, surprise—satisfied.

Exercise More

It's easy to find excuses not to exercise. Thankfully, Cara Marshall, your fitness guru, will give you plenty of reason to be more active, starting with her enviable physique and encouraging energy. Between sun salutations, meditation, planks, push-ups, uppercuts, burpees, Bosu ball training and brisk walks along the coast, you'll rediscover what you love about exercise and learn some new, inspiring moves. The result: All this calorie-burning (eight hours of exercise over two days) will snap you out of your exercise rut and leave you feeling more toned and raring to go.

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Stress Less

Persistent stress can cause a lot of problems (high blood pressure and heart disease, to name a few). It can even add to your muffin top thanks to a combo of cortisol and mindless noshing. That's why the Pelican Hill team tackles it head on, teaching you the benefits of breathing, meditating and yoga. Plus the program includes two tension-taming massages at its five-star spa: the Slow Down, a muscle-melter that irons out kinks; and Amber Gold, a detoxifying dry brush/rubdown combo.

Reflect More

Renewing your sense of self is also an integral part of the program. The discussion on Day One will turn your thoughts inward and help feed your mind just like food and exercise feed your body. Yes, there are group activities aplenty, but there's also ample alone time. It's during these agenda-free moments when life really seems to slow down. You'll emerge richer in spirit and renewed in confidence. And that's the ultimate take-home message. ■

DOWNTIME PURSUITS

Pelican Hill's free-time options, from chillin' to shopping.

Chillax – Lazing in your lavish room isn't tough: Soak in the marble tub, chill on the terrace, cozy up to the limestone fireplace and bury yourself in the 500-thread-count sheet.

Swim – The Coliseum pool is no ordinary swimming hole. One of the largest circular pools in the world (136 feet in diameter) with a million iridescent hand-laid tiles, the setting is as beautiful as the bikini-clad crowd. Don't be surprised if you spot a celeb lounging poolside.

Sweat – If you're craving even more conditioning, there's a revolving roster of complimentary classes in the fitness center, as well as a fully equipped gym. Flavored water, magazines and TV's are just calorie-burning extras.

Spa – No one said you had to limit yourself to just two massages; indulge in the tempting menu of natural, organic treatments. Must try: the Body Gelato, a delicious scrub finished off with a body butter massage and a bite of gelato. Don't leave without savoring the herbal steam room, sauna, Roman bath and herbal teas.

Shop – With four on-site boutiques, there's lots of opportunity to shop. Or hop on a shuttle to Fashion Island, a name-brand oasis where you'd happily get stranded.